

Dear Mr. Wells:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during our public meeting held in Alton, Illinois, on August 15, 2002. In your statement you expressed the state of Missouri's concerns regarding operational changes proposed for the Missouri River and the resulting impacts to the Mississippi River. You also requested that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reevaluate the Devils Lake outlet project in North Dakota.

In regard to your comments concerning the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual Review and Update, a recommendation for a Preferred Alternative (PA) water control plan was made to the Headquarters of the Corps and to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works in May of this year. At that time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Council on Environmental Quality were also informed of the PA. The Corps and the Service agreed to enter into informal consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and are currently engaged in that process.

During the informal consultation, the Corps and the Service are working cooperatively to assess available scientific and technical information and explore a range of possibilities regarding operation of the Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System. The two agencies believe the public will be much better served by a product that reflects the coordinated position of the entire Executive Branch. The Corps will use the results of

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the consultative process as we complete the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Master Manual Review and Update. The FEIS will include a description of the environmental and economic impacts of the PA including an analysis of impacts to some Mississippi River uses/resources. A 30-day comment period will follow release of the FEIS to provide the public an opportunity for review and comment. Following the comment period, the Corps will prepare a Record of Decision, revise the existing Master Manual to reflect the selected water control plan, and implement that plan.

Relative to the reevaluation of the Devils Lake outlet project, the Corps is further addressing some of the unresolved issues identified in the draft report such as refinement of an operating plan and mitigation plan for an outlet, compliance with the Clean Water Act and Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, and development of plans for infrastructure protection. The Corps has no plans to further evaluate the economic viability of the outlet. The draft report did evaluate an outlet from both a stochastic, as well as a scenario-based approach, in order to display the cost effectiveness of an outlet for various future lake conditions. Our data does not support your statement that ". . . all threatened homes and businesses already have been relocated" and "There is no remaining threat and, therefore, no remaining justification for an outlet." There are many homes and businesses around the lake being threatened by flooding, as well as the areas downstream that are potentially threatened by a natural overflow.

Balancing the flood control, navigation, and environmental needs within the Mississippi Valley remains a challenge. Your continued input is invaluable to the Corps' ability to meet this challenge. The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
President Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission